

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-10

OMB-01 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 AID-05 FRB-03

TRSE-00 XMB-02 OPIC-03 CIEP-01 AGR-05 IGA-02 /100 W

----- 098024

R 031041Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6269

INFO COMUSMACTHAI ZANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 0063

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, TH, PGOV

SUBJ: THAI POLITICAL SITUATION, JANUARY 3

REF: A) 75 BANGKOK 26894, B) BANGKOK 0051

SUMMARY: THAI STRIKE OVER THE RICE AND SUGAR PRICE HIKE NOW IN ITS SECOND DAY (REFTELS). RTG AND STRIKING UNIONS BOTH APPEAR DETERMINED TO HOLD THEIR POSITIONS, AND THE STRIKE MAY DRAG ON INDEFINITELY. PUBLIC INCONVENIENCE IS ONLY SLIGHT AT THIS POINT, BUT COULD INCREASE WITH TIME. END SUMMARY

1. THE GENERAL STRIKE OVER INCREASE IN RICE AND SUGAR PRICES (REFTELS) IS CONTINUING. THE RESPECTIVE POSITIONS OF THE RTG AND STRIKING UNIONS REMAIN UNCHANGED, AND BOTH SEEM TO BE HARDENING THEIR RESOLVE. THE RTG HAS BRANDED THE STRIKE ILLEGAL, AND STRIKE LEADERS ARE THREATENING STRONGER ACTION IF THE GOVERNMENT DEILARES A STATE OF EMERGENCY OR DISMISSES WORKERS.

2. STRIKE LEADERS CLAIM THAT FIFTY-FOUR UNIONS REPRESENTING 200,000 WORKERS ARE SUPPORTING THE STRIKE, WHILE THE RTG CLAIMS THE WORKERS ARE MERELY ENJOYING AN EXTENDED NEW YEAR'S HOLDIAY. ALTHOUGH THE ORGANIZERS OF THE STRIKE, THE FEDERATION

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OF LABOR UNIONS OF THAILAND (FLUT), INCLUDES SOME INDUSTRIAL

UNIONS, ITS BACKBONE IS MADE UP OF WELL ORGANIZED STATE ENTERPRISE UNIONS, AND THE STRIKE HAS BEEN MOST EFFECTIVE AMONG THE LATTER.

3. DEPUTY MINISTER OF INTERIOR PRAKOP PRAYUNPHOKKHARAT IS COORDINATING EFFORTS OF A TASK FORCE TO RESOLVE THE STRIKE. THE TASK FORCE HAS THREATENED TO FIRE STRIKERS AT STATE ENTERPRISES AND HAS PREPARED POLICE PROTECTION FOR WORKERS WHO RETURN TO WORK ON MONDAY, JANUARY 5.

4. IN AN EFFORT TO GAIN PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE FOR PRICE HIKE, PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT WENT ON TELEVISION THE EVENING OF JANUARY 1. HE EXPLAINED HIS PROGRAM IN DETAIL IN TERMS OF BENEFIT TO FARMERS, AND SOUGHT TO ANSWER CRITICISMS LEVELED AT PRICE INCREASES. THIS IS FIRST TIME IN RECENT MEMORY THAT A THAI LEADER HAS GONE DIRECTLY TO THE PEOPLE TO EXPLAIN HIS ACTIONS AND ASK FOR SUPPORT. REACTION TO KHUKRIT SPEECH AT THIS POINT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO GAUGE.

5. UNION LEADERS WILL MEET WITH RTG REPRESENTATIVES ON

JANUARY 4. THEY SAY THEY ARE WILLING TO NEGOTIATE, BUT ARE AFRAID THE GOVERNMENT WILL REFUSE TO COMPROMISE, AND PREDICT THAT THE STRIKE WILL CONTINUE INTO THE COMING WEEK. THE GOVERNMENT HAS SHOWN NO WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE ON THIS ISSUE, AND SEEMS DETERMINED TO MEET THE UNIONS HEAD ON. AT THIS TIME, NO SOLUTION IS IN SIGHT.

6. THE "GENERAL STRIKE" HAS ADDED TO THE OTHER IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS FACING THE KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT. DEMONSTRATIONS ARE CONTINUING IN PATTANI, WHERE BETWEEN 2 000 AND 3,000 DEMONSTRATORS CONTINUE THEIR VIGIL IN PROTEST OVER RECENT MURDERS IN SOUTH (REF A). OUR CONSUL IN SONGKHLA REPORTS THAT TEACHERS, MOSTLY NON-MUSLIM, WILL CLOSE SCHOOLS THROUGHOUT THE FIVE SOUTHERN PROVINCES (SONGKHLA, NARATHIWAT, PATTANI, YALA, AND SATUN) TO PRESSURE THE GOVERNMENT INTO NEGOTIATIONS. KHUKRIT IS PROBABLY GOING TO HAVE TO MAKE A MAJOR CONCILIATORY MOVE TO END THE CONFRONTATION THERE.

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7. THE DIFFICULTIES THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS HAVING IN DEALING WITH THESE ISSUES HAS PROVIDED FUEL TO OPPOSITION ELEMENTS IN PARLIAMENT, STILL ENGAGED IN THE PROCESS OF ORGANIZING A VOTE OF NO-CONFIDENCE. IT HAS ALSO CAUSED INCREASED RUMBLING AMONG CONSERVATIVES AND MILITARY LEADERS WHO ADVOCATE STRONGER LEADERSHIP AND LESS LIBERALISM IN GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS. IF THE GOVERNMENT IS ABLE TO DEAL WITH THE GENERAL STRIKE SUCCESSFULLY, IT WILL HAVE STRENGTHENED ITS IMAGE CONSIDERABLY.

BUT IF IT STUMBLES AND THE SITUATION DETERIORATES, THE  
GOVERNMENT WILL BE IN A CONSIDERABLY WEAKENED POSITION TO DEAL  
WITH OTHER ISSUES MENTIONED ABOVE.  
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